



McDougall's Good Stories for Children



The Wonderful Story of Elves, a Peculiar Baby, a Dog and a Boy With X-Ray Eyes and Their Many Very Strange Adventures

LOTS of stories have been written about elves and the changelings which they leave instead of babies in cradles, but nobody has ever told why they ceased this unpleasant practice. I didn't know the reason myself until I heard the story of Harry Manheim and his baby sister Dorothy.

Harry was a blind boy, blind from birth, and, like all who are born without sight, he was accustomed to going about alone, and could find his way so easily as to astonish all who saw him. His mother was a poor woman, who was obliged to do sewing to support her two children, and so Harry was left to take care of his sister all day. He had a dog named Tatters, a very intelligent skye terrier, who perhaps watched more closely over the infant than her brother, for he rarely left her side for more than a minute when he went to investigate any strange noise. Harry, although he was a boy of good disposition, had many sad and gloomy moments, and was often sad and disheartened, and at these times he used to visit an old hermit who lived in a cave in the forest near his home. The hermit cheered him with tales of the past, and many were the wonderful things the blind boy learned from the ancient man, who rarely spoke to any one else. He told the lad all about the elves, the fairies, dragons and wood nymphs that frequented the forest shades, and Harry was as well posted regarding such matters as I am myself. When he was minding Dorothy he would ponder upon what he had learned from the hermit and wonder if he would ever see any of the things he knew all about, but this was far beyond his hopes, as the doctors had said that he would never be able to see. The old hermit, however, denied this, and, as he took a pinch of snuff, would shake his head and say:

"Wait, my boy, wait. I'll discover something yet that will enable you to see as well as any of them." But as time passed on and nothing came of his prediction Harry had long forgotten it, and never expected to be taught but a sightless man when he grew up.

One summer day he was sitting in the shade near the house, and Dorothy was playing with Tatters on the grass, when the thing happened that changed everything. He had been pondering, and was suddenly aroused by hearing Tatters bark in a peculiar manner, a bark that said as plain as words that something was wrong. Harry sprang up, calling Dorothy, but when she did not reply he began to move about in the garden in search of the baby. Tatters wildly rushing here and there, with excited barks. The search was vain, for Dorothy had disappeared.

Harry was almost overcome with grief, but when he went into the house and heard a strange gurgling sound in Dorothy's cradle he was relieved, for he thought that she had crept into it. A moment later, when he heard Tatters growl, he ran his fingers over the face of the infant, as the blind do when they wish to identify anybody, and discovered that the child in the cradle was not his own sister, but a cold, clammy thing like a doll made of putty, and he shuddered, for he remembered all that the old hermit had related about the elves and changelings. He knew instantly what had happened, and so, I suppose, did Tatters.

HERMIT HELPED HIM

When he thought of his mother's grief his heart failed him, and he determined to go at once to the hermit and ask his advice, for he could not remember what was usually done when a changeling comes into the house. He stopped on the way to the hermit's cave to buy an ounce of snuff, for that always put the old man into the very best humor, and then he went on.

The hermit said he was not at all surprised at what had happened, for he had been expecting it. "You did right in coming to me," said he, "for perhaps I may be able to help you." Then he took a big pinch of snuff and added: "There is only one way known that will compel the elves to return the baby, and that is to get a duck's egg, blow out the inside and run a green ribbon through it. Then hang it around the changeling's neck. This has been tried many times in ancient days, and is said to be a never-failing method."

"I'll do it right away!" cried Harry, and he ran off so quickly that he forgot all about the hermit's snuff, which was in his pocket. He knew just where a duck was sitting on six eggs, and it took him only ten minutes to get one, and five minutes more to blow out its contents. Then he stopped short in dismay, for he suddenly remembered that he couldn't tell a green ribbon from a red one. However, he knew where there were lots of ribbons in a bag in the closet, and, taking them one by one and passing them over the puttylike changeling until it suddenly screamed in rage, he soon came to the conclusion that the one that offended it must be green. Then he strung the duck's egg upon it, and tied it around the putty-baby's neck, although it wriggled and squirmed like an eel on a hook.

Its struggles ceased, however, as soon as the ribbon was around its neck, and it lay so still that he thought he had choked it, but after a long silence the putty baby spoke and said:

"Well, you have beaten me. I have lived a thousand years, but never have I heard of a human discovering this secret. Now, what will you do to me?"

"That depends," replied Harry. "If you will bring my sister back, I'll let you go; but if you don't, I'll put you in the oven and roast you, and Tatters will eat you."



THE TERRABILIS GUARDING THE BABIES

The putty-baby squealed: "Ugh! Don't speak of it! You shall have her back as soon as you can get her, but you must do it yourself, for I am helpless here until the time comes for me to be a full-grown elf."

"And when will that be?" asked the boy. "You may have heard," replied the putty-child, "that all elves are babies shapeless and hideous as myself for a time (it was fully a thousand years in my case) until a chance is found to exchange them for human babies. Then the changeling elf remains in the house until the Terrablis sneezes, when it is immediately taken home to Elfland and thereafter is a full-grown elf."

"What on earth is a Terrablis?" inquired Harry. "I've heard of a lot of funny ones, but never of a Terrablis."

"It's the great earth-animal, half-mole, half-worm and the rest weasel," replied the putty-baby. "It dwells far under ground, where the elves live and it guards the human babies caught by the elves, but when it sneezes that's the signal that they must be immediately exchanged again, and all the elves are very glad, for then their own babies can come home and be men or women. The Terrablis has not sneezed for over a year, and twelve babies are waiting and twelve elves who are very tired. I assure you, of listening to the nonsensical talk they are hearing in human houses."

"You must find the entrance to the elfin land, and that is under a rock in the forest. I will show it to you if you'll take me there."

"We will go at once, for my mother must not be grieved when she returns by finding that Dorothy has been absent from home at all," said Harry. "I'll carry you." He picked up the clammy thing and slung it over his shoulder, then started for the forest and went where the putty-baby directed him. When they arrived at the rock Harry soon found that the elves entered through an opening which was far too small for him to crawl through, and he said:

"Is there no other way to get in?" "Yes," said the putty-baby. "There is an old hollow tree yonder by which you may be able to enter."

DOWN INTO THE ELVES' HOME

Harry went to the tree and found a great hole in its trunk. Through this he crawled at once, followed by Tatters, who seemed to be aware that they were on the track of the lost child. In the great hollow of the tree he found a flight of worn stone steps which once in ancient times were perhaps the steps of some ruined castle or temple upon which the tree had taken root and grown. A dark hole yawned at the foot of these steps, but the blind boy, to whom both daylight and darkness were alike, went down the steps without hesitating. Feeling his way along the side of the wall he went down a slanting gallery slowly until he came to a moss-covered door which yielded to a strong push. Once beyond the door the gallery widened into a lofty grotto, all sparkling with points of many colored crystal and with specks of gold and silver flecking it everywhere, but he saw it not.

"It's a great pity that I can't see," said Harry. "For I would like to be able to tell mother all about it. Are we near the Terrablis now?"

"Oh, we have still far to go before we reach the spot where he keeps guard," said the putty-baby. "I am not as certain as I was a little while ago that even I can guide you to the place. The various passages are so mixed up that one has to be here a long time before he knows them all, and I am only a thousand years old, a mere infant, you know."

"What do elves eat?" asked Harry, seeking for information.

"All sorts of things," said the putty-baby. "Everything that grows or lives underground is our meat—carrots, parsnips, potatoes, turnips and other roots, and we serve them with earthworms, roasted, boiled or stewed, which are very fine in the right season. Then we have ant-pie and scrambled ant's-eggs, turtle-eggs, sometimes, when we are lucky, and also snake-eggs, which are delicious. We grow splendid mushrooms down here, too, and from them we make a very exquisite wine, also; but they have never let me taste it. I'm too young. Once in a while we catch and kill a small mole and then we have a real feast. But we do not eat as often as you do, I suppose. We have breakfast in January, lunch in April and dinner, a grand affair, indeed, in September. I am speaking of the grown-up elves, you know, for the babies don't eat at all. Not until the elf-salve is rubbed on them."

A VALUABLE SECRET

"What is elf-salve?" asked the boy.

"That's a magic ointment that makes an elf complete and perfect. When it is rubbed on me all over I will be able to do anything an elf can do. I will be able to see through the hardest rocks and tell just what is inside, or discover the contents of an iron chest or anything hidden away. I will be able to hear the slightest sound, such as the noise grass makes in growing. I will be able to smell anything a mile or so away, see in the darkest night and remember everything I've learned forever."

Harry determined that if he came within reach of that salve he would have his fingers in it in a twinkling.

"What's the use of elves, anyway?" he inquired. "Dear me, what a question!" cried the putty-baby. "I never thought anything about it, but I suppose we have our uses. We burrow far down in the earth and bring up gold to places where men can find it, but generally we fix it so that they always have to work mighty hard to get it, or else it would not be valued, you see. If gold was as common as other things, say salt, for instance, nobody would want it at all. It's because it's so very rare and men have to work hard to get it, usually, that it is so precious."

"It's a great pity, as you have said, that you can't see all this splendor," remarked the putty-baby. "For it is even in my eyes truly magnificent. We have dozens of such halls as this, but I like this one the best."

Beyond this room they came to a submarine lake, the water of which was a lovely pink, like circus-lemonade, and a strange, mysterious light shone up from the bottom. At the shore of this opal pond a boat made of mother-of-pearl with ivory oars was floating, and into it the putty-baby directed Harry to step.

"This is the only kind of boat that an elf can cross water in," said the putty-baby. "In no other way can we get over even a tiny stream."

"I have heard the hermit say the same thing," said Harry. "But I can't see what would keep the elves from burrowing under the stream, making a tunnel beneath it," he added.

"We do that all the time," replied the infant. "But sometimes we like to take a sail, and this is how we do it."

Harry took the oars, and although he did not know how to row at all, they seemed to propel the pretty craft through the water very well. At the other side of the lake a waterfall came dashing down from a high cascade that made music that

was very sweet, and this the blind boy could appreciate very well. He sat there listening to the water-music as if in a trance while the pearly boat rocked on the tiny waves.

"This is worth coming for, isn't it?" asked the putty-baby.

"It certainly is, and it almost made me forget all about my sister Dorothy," replied Harry. "We must not waste time here!" He rowed to the shore and got out of the boat hastily. "Now show me where she is," he demanded.

"I will do my best; indeed I will," cried the baby, for Harry was squeezing it in his excitement. "We must follow this path and you must walk along straight ahead, for there is no wall here to guide you. The roof is very high and the sides are very far off."

Harry boldly walked up the path, over what seemed to him to be a very lofty hill and then down again on the other side. The music came faintly to his ears from far away, but soon another sound, at first indistinct and then quite loud, a sound of hammers and picks at work, broke upon the underground silence.

"What's that noise?" he asked.

"That's the elves at work making a new passage to the cellar of an ancient castle belonging to the ogre Gatorico, which once stood immediately over this spot ages ago. There is a treasure there that would make a king jump for joy to find."

"I wouldn't hurt them, that is, if they'll give up my sister."

"They won't do that unless you compel them by threatening to roast me in an oven."

"I'll do it, and I'll say that I'll cut you p first and maybe stew you beside."

The putty-baby shivered and trembled. "I will beg them to restore her at once," it said in a faint voice. "I guess you'd better hurry up and see if you can speak to them at once."

Harry hurried along, and as he walked he heard the elves throwing down their tools and scurrying away into distant passages in great alarm. He was in a circular room a moment later, and he ran against a sort of chest and stumbled over it.

He hurriedly opened the chest and felt within, and instantly his hand came in contact with a diamond box, which he lifted.

HE FOUND THE INFANTS

He raised its lid, and feeling a moist, sticky substance within, he took some of it upon his forefinger and then rubbed it upon his sightless eyes. It was the elves' magic salve and instantly its effect was apparent, for he saw everything around him at once. His delight was so great that he trembled as he took in for the first time the meaning of light and color. For a few minutes he stared at the shining walls, all studded with glittering gems and sparkling like so many tiny stars, and then he looked at the hideous putty-baby.

"Rub some on me," said the infant.

"Not yet," he replied. "I am too foxy. I'll do it when I get my sister back, but not before."

"It will be easy enough now," said the putty-baby. "You can now see far into the rocks if you wish and discover where the Terrablis is hidden. Try it."

Harry peered at the wall, and to his amazement he found he could see far, far into it. He looked in every direction hastily, not stopping to study any of the wonders he saw until not very far off, in a sort of circular pocket all lined with fleecy moss he saw a number of human babies asleep. Just beyond them lay the Terrablis, its red eyes glinting

Harry Manheim, a Blind Boy, Learned From a Hermit Lessons Which Restored His Lost Sister and Made Him a Man of Enormous Wealth

in the darkness of its own cave and watching closely the sleeping infants. A narrow passage led to the babies' resting place or prison, and Harry hurried along this. He could see the frightened elves now very plainly hiding behind clumps of moss rocks and in crannies, but he did not stop.

"Be careful!" said the putty-baby, "or you will get too close and the Terrablis will grab you. What do you intend to do?"

Harry stopped suddenly.

"I never thought about the danger. All I saw was my sister lying there beside that monster."

"You can't rescue her all alone," said the putty-baby. "Remember, the children will not be given up by him until the time comes for him to sneeze."

"Then the time has come right now!" cried Harry, suddenly remembering the package of snuff, of the very strongest kind, that he had forgotten to give to the hermit. "I'll make him sneeze soon enough if I can get near him!" He thought a moment, and then began to gather up a number of the most brilliant glow-worms from the mossy floor.

"What are you doing that for?" asked the putty-baby.

"I'll dazzle him with them, and as light, you know, sometimes makes people sneeze, even these alone may do the business, but if I can approach him I'll make sure." He took the package of snuff in one hand and the glow-worms in the other, having disposed of the putty-baby by tucking it into his shirt-front, and then he stole up to the monster cautiously.

The glow-worms shone like a headlight as he held them aloft, and they shone into the eyes that glared beyond in the darkness, and the Terrablis sniffed and snuffed, but he did not sneeze. However, he was dazzled and blinded by the glare so that Harry crept close to him, and then the animal scented him. He opened his great red nostrils to discover what was approaching him, and Harry tossed nearly all of the snuff into the yawning cavities. The Terrablis drew a deep breath and then a mighty sneeze rang out, a sneeze that shook the very walls of rock above them and made echoes go ringing along the passages into the remotest depths, alarming those elves who had not heard or seen the intruder and filling them with joy. Now they could have their own babies back, for the Terrablis had sneezed, and they dropped their tools and ran for the great hall. But the poor Terrablis had taken so much snuff that he could not stop sneezing. He kept on sneezing, each one louder than the one before, until suddenly a great cracking was heard, and he sneezed his head off.

But before this Harry had grabbed his sister Dorothy as she lay in the moss and held her tightly in his arms.

ALL ARE RICH AND HAPPY

The elves were very angry when they saw what he had done, for they did not like this intrusion, but he threatened to roast and boil and stew the putty-baby if they interfered with him, so they promised not to harm him. However, when they found that he had the magic ointment they almost went crazy. He disclosed this to them by rubbing it on the putty-baby before he laid it down, and instantly it became a fine, pleasant-looking elf, who was very grateful, but the others were dismayed, indeed. They now knew that he was as powerful as an elf himself and they could not harm him. They begged him to restore their treasured magic salve and promised to give him tons of gold, but he laughed, for he now could see just where all the gold lay and could get all he wanted himself. Still he was merely teasing them, and soon one of them, wiser than the rest, saw this, and whispered to the former putty-baby to request Harry to use as much of the salve as he wished and return the rest to them.

The putty-baby did this, and Harry could not refuse him, as he had so wonderfully helped him in his search, although, to be sure, he had done it through fear. He rubbed some more salve upon his eyes and on those of Dorothy and also upon both of their bodies, after which he handed the diamond box to the putty-baby. A great outcry arose, for the fact that the putty-baby held the box mad, him a sort of chief-elf, as only certain old and wise ones were ever allowed to touch it or even see it. But Harry was rather glad of that, as it made mends for scaring him so badly.

But they did not make much of an objection, after all, as the putty-baby came from a family of very high rank, and when Harry requested to be guided to the outer world at once, so that he could return home before his mother did, they conducted him by another way to the sunlight.

He reached the house just a few minutes before his mother did, for both of them were able to see her two miles off, and could take their time, you see. Now they are grown up, but still they have this wondrous power, and they use it to discover poor sick people, for whom they find much gold, and even diamonds, sometimes. As to their own wealth they got so tired of money that they scarcely ever have it in the house. To them gold is of no more account than clay, for they could have a tall mountain of it if they wished, by simply taking a cart and going after it. But one good thing was accomplished by Harry's adventure, for, since the head of the Terrablis fell off, the elves have not dared to take away any babies at all, as they never could change them back again. You'll never hear of it being done, unless perhaps there is another of these animals somewhere to be found, which is very doubtful. I certainly hope another can't be found, for it's an awful thing to have a changeling in the house.

WALT MCDUGALL.

